

Conservation

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Current Situation

The cultural resources of California are being lost or damaged at an alarming rate and there is no strategy for the conservation of cultural resources. A statewide effort is needed to recognize this problem and take steps to remedy the situation.

Population data indicate many additional Californians will soon be occupying and recreating within our rapidly disappearing open spaces, where many archaeological sites exist. The open space in California — in particular, public lands dedicated to recreation and public use— will face ever-increasing pressures to provide greater access and flexibility in allowable uses. There are two main issues connected with cultural resources conservation:

- Population growth and the demand for use of open space: There is an increasing pressure to convert land to development and recreational use.
- The general lack of recognition of the importance of conserving cultural resources on a landscape scale: This results in incremental loss of cultural and traditional areas.

Ideal Situation

Archaeological sites are often interconnected locations used systematically by people that include living areas and processing locations. They may also be tied to places that, although not archaeological sites, are part of the overall “cultural landscape”, such as resource gathering areas and sacred or religious places. There are many examples of these areas being preserved, but few that have been recognized as districts or cultural landscapes. Instead, individual archaeological sites and features are recorded without acknowledging the connection between the sites and features—or of those material components to the environment. Without the concept of the overall cultural landscape, individual sites and features may appear to lack importance and are incrementally destroyed by development or inappropriate public uses. The ideal situation would:

- Conserve open space specifically for archaeological districts and the overall cultural landscapes of which they are a part.
- Consider appropriateness of uses for this land and control those uses.

How to Bridge the Gap

Conservation of cultural resources can be accomplished through changes in planning, implementation of collaborative efforts, improved education, and a change in the perspective of professional archaeologists from a focus on individual sites to archaeological districts and cultural landscapes. The following actions are recommended:

- Acquire land to conserve cultural resources and restrict the use of the land to protect these resources. Make sure there is adequate funding in bond acts and other budgets to conserve cultural sites in place and to prepare management plans for long term conservation.
- Expand the ability of the State Parks system to create Cultural Preserves to conserve archaeological districts and cultural landscapes.
- Support the concept of cultural landscapes for conservation so that land managers and archaeologists may adjust their context for identification and interpretation of cultural resources to a larger, landscape scale to see the relationships among site types, features, and the environment.
- Support the use of language in land conveyance documents to assure preservation.
- Restrict damaging public activities as land is acquired.
- Seek collaborative relationships with various conservation organizations, conservancies, and land trusts operating in California. Look beyond the archaeological community for partnerships.
- Ensure that archaeological sites, traditional cultural properties, and other cultural properties are given priority in land management decisions.
- State and cultural resources professionals must get involved in local and statewide planning matters.
- Consult with California Indians and other stakeholders in local land use and follow through with commitments based on their recommendations.
- Support and assist public agencies with little to no funds to inventory their lands. Assist in the survey of public lands affected by wildfires, flooding, ongoing natural erosion, impacts brought on by active recreational public uses.
- Discourage excavation of preserved, non-threatened cultural resources. The mission statements of both the Society for American Archaeology and the Society for California Archaeology place site conservation and stewardship of cultural resources as a critical goal for all members.

- Encourage the establishment of conservation programs in colleges and universities that instill a conservation ethos.
- Use district evaluations instead of looking at individual sites in isolation.
- Eliminate Categorical Exemptions from CEQA that result in site destruction. CEQA exempts habitat restoration projects from environmental review, resulting in the destruction of sites even on conserved lands.